

# The West must leverage populism, not attack it

Matt A. Mayer

Last month, French President Emmanuel Macron penned a letter to Europe that called upon the people to support his call for greater integration and coordination among the twenty-seven Member States of the European Union (EU). Macron's call to action came in the face of upcoming European Parliament elections in which populist parties are expected to do significantly better than in past elections. The request also comes in the face of Brexit and U.S. President Donald Trump's actions some EU members see as hostile to NATO.

Ultimately, Macron's appeal will fail, as prior appeals from French and German leaders have failed. Why do these Establishment movements always demanding more Europe fail year-after-year?

Two key reasons: first, until 1945 and, some could argue, 1991, Europe was little more than a continent full of nations which had spent much of the preceding millennia at war with each other. Yes, of course, from the continent came the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Reformation, the Rights of Man, and countless other movements and discoveries that propelled western civilization forward, as much of the world remained mired in darkness. Those advances, however, sprung from nations in spite of an ever-warring Europe.

Second, it ignores human nature's desire for power to be exercised by each man for himself or over him by those closest to him so as to ensure accountability, transparency, and, ultimately, sovereignty. More Europe inherently means less of all of those things, thereby grinding against man's natural suspicions and fears. Those rational emotions give rise to populism and patriotism, which increase in lock-step with the calls for more centralization. Macron's rallying cry becomes a doubled-edged sword that cuts both ways, inspiring his allies and his opponents.

The smarter appeal would have aimed at the broader audience of western civilization calling for greater unity of purpose in our shared confrontation of common enemies and threats. Think back just forty years when UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher joined U.S. President Ronald Reagan, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and Pope John Paul II to rally western civilization against the Soviet Union and the scourge of communism. Only through unity of purpose among those great leaders and the nations and institutions they represented did we win the Cold War, thereby freeing tens of millions of people who had been trapped behind the Iron Curtain. There was no "Europe."

The United States of Europe will never replace the greatness of nations

Throughout the year, Americans celebrate many holidays some of which we share with our European cousins like Easter, Christmas, and Halloween. Other holidays, however, are uniquely American ones. The biggest, of course, is on July 4<sup>th</sup> when we celebrate our independence from England. Close behind is Thanksgiving when we celebrate the help our pilgrim founders, some of whom came from Leiden, received from Native Americans that allowed them to survive those early harsh years in America. We celebrate our great leaders, as well, including George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and



Martin Luther King, Jr. These various celebrations unify Americans and remind us that, despite our political differences, at the end of the day we are all “one Nation under God.”

Similar celebrations occur across your continent, but few of those celebrations cross national lines. Rather, each nation, like the United States, celebrates its own leaders, achievements, and memories. There is no national European football team to root for in the World Cup. No European Olympic team to cheer every two years. And, of course, there is no unifying language, culture, or history that unifies the peoples across Europe.

These examples may sound silly, but without them what is Europe other than a transactional and logistical entity that eases travel and commerce (as it makes doing business harder with every new regulation)? Without them, how do you transform people from identifying themselves by where they live versus who they are? While the analogy isn't perfect, I live in the state of Ohio, but I am an American. When I moved to Colorado for six years, where I lived changed, but who I was remained firm and fixed.

The call for more Europe creates cognitive dissonance among Europeans because no one truly knows what it means. At the same time, they know all too well what it would do – take

more power from their nation and have those powers exercised farther away from where they live by men and women who aren't truly accountable to them, don't act in a transparent manner, and peel away more of their sovereignty.

#### More Europe ultimately leads to more populism and patriotism

The populism driving Establishment politicians in Washington, D.C., and Brussels crazy comes from the same mother, Centralization. More Europe has never been fully adopted by the peoples of Europe. In fact, the question of more Europe has never survived a popular vote across its members, which is why more Europe gets forced on the people by clever agreements never voted on by the people.

Today's populism arose first in Europe in 2005 with the defeat of the proposed European Constitution in France and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, it was first captured by Pim Fortyn in 2002 followed by Rita Verdonk, Geert Wilders, and Thierry Baudet. Populism was driven by two events: by radical jihadist Mohammed Bouyeri's shocking killing of Theo Van Gogh in the streets of Amsterdam and by the continued accretion of sovereignty by Brussels. It spread to other countries slowing upsetting the ruling order, accelerated by Angela Merkel's overzealous invitation to millions of migrants

[A 'blue collar worker'.](#) “The blue collar fifty-year old man in Ohio is no different than his laborer brother in Rotterdam, as both watched their jobs disappear and seemingly reappear in China” (photo: Wikimedia Commons)

## Opinion

from the Middle East and North Africa to come to Europe. As I predicted in my May 2014 report, “European Disunion: The European Union Parliamentary Elections and Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine: The Beginning of the End of the EU and NATO?”, each passing year, populists gain greater shares of parliaments across Europe and, in some cases, come to power in places like Austria and Italy. These results happen because the Establishment in national capitals and in Brussels continue to fail to address the kitchen-table needs of the people to achieve both economic and personal security. Populists are projected to do quite well in the European parliamentary elections in May. *Cordon Sanitaire* increasingly looks like the famous tale of the little boy putting his finger in the dyke as the dyke crumbles under the weight of the water building up behind it.

More Europe will only drive more people into the populist’s corner. Keep in mind, we’ve not had a recession in more than ten years. We are overdue for one and when it hits, unemployment will go up, bills on credit will come due, and people will blame those in charge in The Hague and Brussels. Imagine what the 2021 Dutch national election could look like should a recession strike in the months before people vote. Populists could sweep to power.

Populism hit America’s shore in 2010 with the rise of the Tea Party when Barack Obama pushed through Obamacare, a massive centralization of America’s health care by the federal government. In 2016, Americans, like the British did with Brexit (which I also predicted in my 2014 report), opted to put a populist in the presidency hoping that he would finally drain the swamp in Washington, D.C., and hear their calls for decentralization. As we march towards the 2020 election, retro-progressives have sprung up on America’s Left with the rise of socialist politicians taking over the Democrats’ agenda and talking points. In an election between populism and socialism, Americans will side with populism every time. Should Trump win a second term, brace yourselves for even greater unrest in America.

If Europe and America want to tame the populist beast, both countries must step back from pushing more centralization, return sovereignty to the degree possible, and force America’s federal government and the EU to focus on those smaller set of competencies where continental centralization truly is needed. Both continents also must come back together to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

The West must unify against our common threats

Macron’s letter represented little more than a political slogan

destined to be dismissed and joked about. Instead of fighting against populism and people’s natural desire to protect their sovereignty, Macron should have gone bigger.

How did we get to a point where French and German leaders place the United States in the same category as China and Russia in terms of threats to Europe? Was the election of Trump really all it took to erase our shared heritage, the sacrifices Americans made twice in the last hundred years to free western Europe, and the common victories we achieved together? America didn’t turn on Europe when Gerhard Schroeder and Jacques Chirac adopted virulent anti-American positions in 2002 to get re-elected. Sure, we started calling French Fries Freedom Fries and Donald Rumsfeld talked about old versus new Europe, but our leaders didn’t place France or Germany in the same bucket as our real enemies.

Western civilization faces common enemies and threats that require the kind of unity last seen during the Cold War and after the September 11 terrorist attacks. To be clear, I am not referring to Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilization pitting western civilization against Islam. Yes, one threat comes from Islamic jihadists who warp an honorable religion in the name of conquest and killing. We must never forget, however, that western civilization’s roots go back to the great civilizations of Persia and Egypt. Though the trees and fruits sprouted along the fertile crescent before arriving in Europe, much of our scientific and intellectual heritage began in the Middle East long before Jesus or Mohammed walked those lands.

China’s mercantilism and theft of intellectual property does as much harm in Europe as it does in America. The blue collar fifty-year old man in Ohio is no different than his laborer brother in Rotterdam, as both watched their jobs disappear and seemingly reappear in China. Our respective trade agreements didn’t protect them, but populism is a siren song that soothes their anxieties.

European companies have had to wrestle with the same challenges entering the Chinese market as American companies and have had to watch their intellectual property get taken and pop-up down the street by a Chinese company. With the debate over 5G hitting a crescendo in Europe and America, ensuring that Chinese companies don’t engage in espionage via their chips and technology is vital across the transatlantic alliance. Patriotism (or is it protectionism?) rallies our citizens whether its stated as “America First” or by the nationalization of a treasured airline (Dutch First?).

The Russian conundrum divides us, but it shouldn’t. NATO



cannot be a viable entity needed to protect Europe against Russia at the same time Germany acquiesces to Nord Stream 2 which will make all of Europe more dependent on Russian natural gas and, more problematically, put vital money into the pocket of Vladimir Putin whose viability depends almost entirely on petrodollars. Either Russia is a threat as evidenced by its role in the shooting down of MH17, its illegal invasions of Georgia and Ukraine, its multiple poisonings with chemical weapons of opponents in the United Kingdom, and its cyberattacks on our elections, or it is a law-abiding country we should not fear, but it can't be both. Does anyone really believe a post-Nord Stream 2 Germany wouldn't veto a NATO Article 5 request by a Baltic nation should Russia do there what it has done in Ukraine and Georgia?

Trump isn't NATO's problem, as his push for European countries to meet the 2% budget commitment has made NATO stronger. NATO's problem is its existence seems superfluous when Russia becomes a key trading partner of its members. We didn't cut trade deals with the Soviet Union. We bankrupted it. It is time for NATO and its members to reformulate its mission to more broadly focus on the preservation and protection of western civilization from tomorrow's existential threats, not the remaining faded shadow of yesterday's boogiemanager.

Populism is growing on both our continents because our governing institutions have ignored the will of the people for far too long. The key to calming our waters and strengthening the transatlantic alliance is to back away from more centralization and refocus our efforts on a common purpose that ultimately increases our prosperity, enhances our security, and preserves the greatness of our nation states. Democracy and capitalism fundamentally transformed the world for the better over the last hundred years. By channeling today's populism more productively, we can fix what stopped working for too many people and reinvigorate those ideas and elements that made America and the countries across Europe great.

Together the West will flourish. Divided it most certainly will crumble.

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